

A Spiritual Forward Movement

An Open Letter

to

Rev. Dr. Fraser

Principal of the Presbyterian College, Montreal

by

Rev. Herbert Symonds, D.D., LL.D.

Vicar of Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal



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"To-day is a day of new hope for the Christian religion: the pains of to-day are the travail pangs of its new birth." Neville Talbot in *Foundations*, p. 16.

My dear Dr. Fraser,

From the very pleasant and intimate intercourse, now covering a good many years, I have enjoyed with you in the Kappa Alpha and elsewhere, there has, in steadily increasing measure, come to me a sincere appreciation of your scholarship and thought, so happily united to a sane and sober judgment concerning the profoundly important things in theology and religion in these critical days. You, on your part, I am sure, know how deeply interested I am in these same subjects, and how strongly I feel that we are living in a time not only of crisis, but of opportunity for the Church. An open door is set before us, but have the Churches a clear enough vision to see it, and sufficient courage and large mindedness to enter by it into the wider field of usefulness to the spiritual life of mankind? Which it leads? Of all the many expressions of foreboding of the impotency of a people to meet a crisis, I know of none more poignantly or sadly suggestive than that of King Hezekiah, when his enemies were loudly knocking at the door. "The children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth." The king was, as it proved, too despondent, but none the less it was from his sense of the danger and difficulty of the moment that his ultimate deliverance came. The question for us is—Are we sufficiently alive to the fact that Hezekiah's figure of speech is singularly appropriate to our own times. Children are undoubtedly come to the birth. Has the Church strength to bear them, or will they be born and nourished outside the borders of her influence? I do not see how those who endeavour to read the signs of the times can fail to observe among the possibilities of the future that of a Church powerless and sterile.

I have thought much of the best way in which, with a

sincere sense of obligation, but I do assure you in a humble spirit, to give expression to some thoughts on this subject, and it is because of my deep regard for you that I venture to adopt for my purpose the form of the open letter. May I add that since what I have to say concerns a wider community than that of the Anglican Church, it seemed to me appropriate to address myself to one who serves another Church which has so splendid and honourable a record for solid achievements in Christian scholarship, Christian practice, and Missionary enterprise.

I

Although I am deeply impressed with the seriousness of our situation in this hour of new births, and haunted with the forebodings of possible failure on the part of the Church to mother them, yet I would not be thought a pessimist. The horizon is by no means all dark. The dominant note of the age is less materialistic than when either you or I were students at College. Our age has seen and laid not a few of those "spectres of the mind" of which Tennyson wrote before we were born. The doctrine of evolution no longer strikes terror to our souls, nor does the higher criticism now seem to shatter the foundations of our faith. The age is not hostile to religion, however cold it may feel towards the Church when men think of it, not as the Beloved Community, or the Universal Society, but as a collection of Denominations. My concern is less for religion than the Church. We cannot fail to observe that much of the spiritual impulse and effort of our times is either outside of the Churches altogether, or partly in and partly outside the Churches, as in the case of the Y. M. C. A. the Student Volunteer Movement, the Brotherhood, the Workers' Educational Association, and not a few other bodies, such as the Rotary and similar clubs. All of these societies feel and feel strongly that in some respects the borders of the Denominations are too narrow to supply their needs. They demand a freer and a fuller fel-

lowship, a fellowship based upon the common human nature and the common human needs, and not upon ancient and partly outworn creeds and systems. They perceive that the barriers dividing Church from Church are largely barriers of tradition and sentiment, or barriers of a theology claiming an infallibility which it can no longer demonstrate, and they say with the poet:

"For forms of faith let graceless zealots fight
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

The theologian may with superior air smile at the shallowness of this couplet, but let him first feel sure that he has extracted from it all the truth it contains. For my part, it seems to afford a better test of him that shall

"Sojourn in the tabernacle of the Lord,
Or shall dwell in His holy hill,"

than any mere denominational system.

I am deeply interested in all such societies. They are, I am convinced, a highly important sign of the times. Viewing these many movements, not only without resentment, but with deep sympathy, I yet feel that my first love is to the Church, though less to the Church as she is than to the Church as she might be.¹

That the Churches are unmindful of these signs of the times, I am far from intending to imply. That a broader spirit pervades them all, I believe, but they are very slow to act. *Festina lente* is not always a good motto. It is true rather of some occasions, that the cry should be, "To-day, oh, that ye would hear His voice!" because "Now is the accepted time." It seems quite within the bounds of possibility that a hundred years hence our children may

(1) In the year 1918 I attended a Communion Service in Appleton Chapel of Harvard University. The celebrant was the Bishop of Massachusetts. Men of several denominations, including Unitarians, broke bread together. To many Church people this seems a dangerous, to some even a scandalous thing. To me it is far more dangerous and scandalous that a Church should reject from Communion any disciple of Christ.

wonder not so much at our blindness of sight, as at our slowness to act.

But it will be said, the Churches are moving. Consider the Forward Movement, and its revelation of the vitality that still resides within the organized Churches. Even the most sanguine are astonished at the universality as well as the generosity of the response to its appeal. And now, encouraged and stimulated by this evidence of the confidence of the people in the Churches, the more important and more enduring part of the Forward Movement, its efforts for a general and strong revival of religion, is about to be undertaken by all the Churches with courageous zeal. "Speak unto the people that they go forward" is the cry.

It is a splendid rally. But what does "Forward" mean to us? Whither are we going? What is the vision that shall guide our action? In what direction lies our Promised Land? How shall we rally all the people to our cause? What is our spiritual message to the men of science, to the statesmen, to the universities, to the great world of commerce, to the men of capital and to the men of labour? Does not almost everything depend upon the answer we give to these questions? Have we realized how new our age is? How far separated in science, in thought, in point of view from that Reformation period which is now one of the past ages? It is in connection with these questions that my gravest misgivings arise. To me it seems—I trust I may be wrong—that scarcely any individuals, or corporate bodies are even asking, still less seriously grappling with them. To enter upon a Spiritual Forward Movement without thoroughly considering some answer to such questions, appears to me to be a courting of failure.

Of one thing I am convinced, and I think you, my dear Principal, will herein agree with me, that an old-fashioned revival, which has for its inspiration a theology untouched by modern thought, is doomed to worse than failure. Given a large organization, given the apparent enthusiasm of multitudes, given the effectiveness of a huge choir and a great volume of singing, given all those conditions for

certain psychological effects upon crowds, which our modern revivalists well understand, and I do not doubt that some results will be achieved. But these methods will utterly fail of accomplishing that Forward Movement for which our age is ripe to-day, they may, in the final analysis, prove a backward movement. Such things have been.

II

Upon the true and comprehensive answers to these and similar preliminary questions, depends the effectiveness and the enduring character of a Forward Movement in Religion. Such questions admit of, and indeed demand, an approach from various points of view. And not the least important view point is that of the Christian scholar and student. And although I am not a specialist in Christian studies, yet it is this aspect of our common problem that most directly interests me. I have a strong conviction that the modern scholar has a contribution of the utmost value to make to a Forward Movement. Indeed I believe it depends more upon him than upon any others whether the movement be forwards or backwards. If the children of Israel in their time of crisis had decided to march back to Egypt, I do not doubt there would have been a great stir and much enthusiasm. And if our Forward Movement take the form of mere emotional revivalism, based upon a theology which is outworn,—a "house of bondage" to the letter—then indeed there may be a great display of crowds, and counting of converts, and yet not progress but regress in the main.

But will the "modern scholar" make his contribution to our Movement? Should he fail it will be a great calamity, but the calamity seems far from impossible. He is somewhat prone to be a quiet spectator on occasions of revival. He is not always free from a placid contempt for the common people that know not the law, which in this case is Modern Science and Higher Criticism. Or he may feel the extraordinary difficulty of converting his scholarship

into a means of revival of religion. Any one of these attitudes of modern scholarship to specific revivals of the ordinary type may possibly be justified. But we are not to-day thinking simply of a revival. Our task is not merely to fan the dying embers of a fire formerly burning brightly. Our Forward Movement includes vision and enlightenment, and guidance away from positions grown old and outworn, and from forms, venerable it may be with antiquity, beloved for their associations, but no longer suitable for the needs of the generations of to-day.

What then is the peculiar contribution of the theologian to a Forward Movement. To me it presents itself as nothing less than the description of that new and better land, in whose possibility humanity, having struck its tents, has shown its faith. The theologian, in so far as he is a pioneer, has made his painful pilgrimage from the security of the old forms of faith, through the fogs of scepticism, over the uncertain ground of new knowledge; he has, like Dante, found himself lost in the dark forest where there seemed to be neither path nor guide; his old landmarks, his old compasses have failed him; yet he has pressed on

"O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent,"

with, for the time being, only one conviction left, that truth is good and demands implicit loyalty. And, at last, he has found himself on a Pisgah height, and surveys a good land stretching out before him. Is not a strong necessity laid upon him to return and make his true report not only of the difficulties and dangers of the path, but of the good land to which it leads, to a generation which is more or less blindly groping, now here, now there, because it has quite made up its mind that it can no longer stand still, that it must go somewhere, but knows not whither?

I think of this Theological Movement as one which embraces all others, just because it is theological. It has to do with God, conceived of as the source of all being, the Father of mankind. I am convinced, and you, my dear Doc-

tor, I know agree with me, that it is not less Theology that we need, but more—only not the theology of the Scribes and Pharisees, a thing good once, like an old suit of clothes, but good no longer; not a thing of traditions of the elders, a *hortus siccus* of specimens of theological growths that lived long years ago, but a living revelation by seers and prophets of a living God. How often, when one speaks of “a good theologian,” it is meant that he knows much of what men thought, and about which they argued, fourteen hundred years ago, but little of what men think and what they need to-day. Not that I would throw scorn on a knowledge of the past. But the true scribe “who hath been made a disciple unto the Kingdom of God is like unto a man who bringeth forth out of his treasure things *new and old*.”

1.—And the emphasis to-day must be laid upon the new. The wise scribe does not bring out of his treasure things old and new indiscriminately. He will know when the new is needed and when the old. He will know when an old garment can safely be patched and when it must be discarded for a new one. And, I repeat, the emphasis to-day is on the new. How can it be otherwise when mankind is already on the march?

What is it that constitutes a new age? How can we know when an “old order changeth,” or any “little system” has had its day? What are the signs of such times, signs that the wise scribe will read aright and act accordingly? Here indeed a knowledge of the past, as well as of the present is essential. Let us see. Suppose we pronounce the word Science in its common acceptation among us. Then suppose we compare the science of to-day with that of the first, or the fourth, or of the sixteenth century. Let us ask how the ordinary man of the 1st or 4th or the beginning of the 16th century conceived of the world in which he lived, of the starry firmament above and about him, and of the way in which things came to be. Is it necessary to do more than remind readers that there was in these matters but little difference between the men of the 1st, 4th or 16th centuries, but there is a vast difference between their

knowledge and that of the ordinary man to-day? The word "revolution" is not too strong to describe the difference. In the realm of science, the age is new. But theology is not independent of science, and a new age of science implies, to some extent at least, a new age of theology.

Or suppose we utter the words History, and Historical Criticism. Here again, though the gulf that divides us from 1st, 4th or 16th century may not be so obvious, it is scarcely less deep than that which separates modern from ancient science. Moreover, people know less about it, and it is possible for them to disregard modern history and criticism in a way in which they can scarcely disregard modern science. But in this matter too, nearly all theologians will agree that a revolution has occurred. And if so, then all the more urgently is it laid upon the theologian to make as clear as he can the facts and the implications of the facts. I must confess that often when I read books that circulate only among theologians, written by theologians in good standing in their own orthodox communions, I wonder what the "common people" would say did they know or understand the critical background of the writers. But is it not time that in some suitable way the common people should be told these things? To give a sense of the newness of this age in matters connected with the Bible alone, I need only write such words as Moses, Pentateuch, Psalms, Old Testament History, Synoptic Problem, Fourth Gospel, Miracles. Our age is very new, and to refuse to recognize the fact is not the part of an instructed scribe, nor will it advance a Forward Movement.

Or yet once more, suppose we questioned some devoted missionary of one hundred years ago concerning his views of religions other than Christianity, and of the objects of his missionary labours. Would he not have said something like this? "Christianity is the only true religion in the world. All others are absolutely false. Now since no one can be saved without the knowledge of Christ, all heathen are doomed to the everlasting pains of hell-fire. My task as a missionary is to snatch as many of these brands from

the burning as possible by preaching Christ to them, and by persuading them to acknowledge Him as God and Lord." Is it too much to say that here too a revolution in our thoughts and convictions has taken place?

It must then be clearly realized that our age is new. And that it is far newer than any of those previous ages into which we are wont to group the Christian centuries, Primitive, Medieval and Reformation.

2.—The next question which we must ask would seem to be this: What are the consequences which follow to the Christian faith from this natural science, this historical criticism and this comparative religion? I think these can most briefly and comprehensively be summed up in the statement that they have virtually demolished our old conceptions of authority. There are no doubt many kinds and degrees of authority. There always will be authorities on all subjects. But the old conception of authority conceived of as wholly external and infallible is gone. The infallible authority of the Pope, of General Councils, or of the Scriptures, all are gone. And what I would urge is that those of us who have rejected the whole notion of infallibility must not be silent upon this matter, still less may we act as though we believed in it.

Now whilst I do not for one moment wish to contend that Historical Criticism or Modern Science should be the direct subject of our sermons, what I do very earnestly submit is that we should not in our preaching, still less in our teaching, ignore what may reasonably be regarded as established by science and criticism, nor should we claim that this or that position is untouched by criticism when every scholar knows that it is gravely affected by it. To pretend to an authority which we no longer possess is not a policy of faith but of fear. And I have observed that it is particularly in connection with Revivals and Missions, that the oldest of old Theology is proclaimed, contempt for learning is displayed, and the results of learning are disregarded. And I greatly fear lest the coming Forward Movement should degenerate into a mere revival, with

its limited appeal to the emotions. No forward movement can be permanent, no forward movement can meet the great needs of our age, which denies or even disregards the results of Modern Science, Historical Criticism or Comparative Religion. Nor can any forward movement be permanently successful which bases its message upon an authority whether of Man, Church, Creed or Book, which can no longer win the unlimited assent of those best qualified to judge of it.²

III

So far I shall seem to have been dealing mainly with negations, and the world can never be saved by being told what it must not believe. Let me then proceed to offer an outline of the kind of statement of Christianity not unsuited to our present day environment.

(1) Christianity did not present itself to the world as a religion of infallible authority. It is a religion of faith, and by faith, in this connection we mean conviction. "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."³ Such is the first confession of faith. It was the result of an inner experience in response not to an external command, but to words that deeply stirred and moved the heart. Seventy or eighty years later, this conviction based upon experience received a more doctrinal form. "We beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth.*"⁴ Not merely the words but the personality brought conviction. Now we are so constituted that we necessarily strive to give as complete expression as possible to our experiences. We formu-

(2) "The world is calling for religion; but it cannot accept a religion if its theology is out of harmony with science, philosophy, and scholarship. Religion, if it is to dominate life, must satisfy both the head and the heart, a thing which neither obscurantism nor rationalism can do." *Foundations.* P. vii.

(3) John vi., 68.

(4) John i., 18.

late them in order to bring them clearly to other minds. This task was undertaken with peculiar zeal by the Church of the first four or five centuries. ⁵ But there is a grave danger in this process. As experience comes to be more and more definitely expressed, the emphasis tends to shift from the conviction and the experience to the form in which it is expressed. The religion of experience then tends more and more to become a religion of external authority. To be a Christian is to accept and assent to this or that form of words now known as a Creed and imposed upon all in this or that precise form as the chief mark and test of a Christian. ⁶ In the course of time this "externalization" of faith happened also to Worship and to Organization. There came to be a Catholic faith, a Catholic worship and a Catholic organization, which, in the sense that was given to the word Catholic, are no longer possible.

From this process of externalization, the Church began to free itself at the time of the Reformation, but it did not go far, nor was it thorough. For a moment, in the proclamation of "justification by faith" and the assertion of the freedom of the soul's access to God, a bright light was flashed upon the road of progress, but men's hearts failed them and the Reformation soon degenerated into a new kind of scholasticism, leading inevitably to various reactions of which the greatest and most enduring is connected with the name of John Wesley. The Methodist appeal to experience was a veritable return to primitive Christianity, and therefore struck so deep and so responsive a chord in the breasts of the "common people."

In claiming that Christianity is not essentially a religion of external authority but depends upon its power to appeal to the heart and produce conviction to the mind, we not only return to the primitive appeal of Jesus, but we are in

(5) Partly because as has often been pointed out, the seed of the Gospel first flourished in a Greek soil. And the Greek mind was intellectual, speculative, logical.

(6) In a discussion on the Athanasian Creed, I have heard a clergyman argue that it was not in the least necessary to understand it. The main thing was to accept it.

accord with the best results of the modern study of religion itself. "Man," said Sabatier, "is incurably religious." An eminent modern philosopher rebukes "the faithlessness and the foolishness of despairing as to the future of the instincts and beliefs which constitute man's higher nature. These are indeed imperishable, the supreme example of that power of self-maintenance and of adaptation to changing circumstance which, science teaches us, is the characteristic of all that lives. Changes in our conception of Nature may be fatal to one formulation after another; accidents of expression may drop away in deference to historical criticism, nay, much that *seemed* of the very essence of religious faith may have to be left behind. But each time that the earthly body of a belief is laid in the dust, it receives a more glorious spiritual body, in which it continues to function as of old in the heart of man... Faith, which is an active belief in the reality of the ideal, is the very breath by which humanity lives, and it will reconstitute itself afresh as long as the race endures." ⁷

In our Forward Movement then let us base our appeal squarely on the religious nature of man, and our Christianity on our conviction that it best supplies the needs of that nature.

(2) I have referred to the religious needs of a religious nature. What, let us ask, is man's supreme religious need? The answer immediately springs to the lips—God. But why does man need God? Why does the Psalmist cry "Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God." ⁸ And why does St. Augustine write "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." Why do strong men and women, secure in their wealth and position, yet love to sing

(7) Pringle-Pattison: *The idea of God*, pp. 81, 82. May I suggest that in this fine passage we have an example of the way in which, in many directions, the old faith can be preached in our modern environment.

(8) Ps. XLII., 1.

"Change and decay in all around I see

O Thou who changest not, Abide with me?"

The answer to these questions is given in various forms. That which appeals to me is this. God is the Infinite Source from Whom all things have proceeded. Man alone of created things is conscious of the Infinite, and yearns after it. He is in some sort akin to God, a divine spark is within him. But it often burns low, it is never a full white flame. Man ever seeks fuller communion with God. The greater souls, Psalmists, Prophets, and Poets have given the highest and deepest expression to what we dimly feel. And so we sing

As pants the hart for cooling streams
When heated in the chase,
So longs my soul for Thee, O God,
And thy refreshing grace.

We love to quote Augustine. Our hearts respond to word and music of the Prophet's assurance,

"If with all your hearts ye truly seek me,
Ye shall surely find Me
Thus saith our God."

And it is ever the same need, the same longing of the soul for the Infinite Source from which it has come.

What name can we give to this Infinite Source to whom we feel ourselves akin, but the name of Father?

The Fatherhood of God, that is our fundamental doctrine, which springs directly from experience and is the expression of experience. Doubtless this seems to many a truism. This, they will say, is the very commonplace of Christianity. Do we not pray "Our Father" twice a day at least? Do we not constantly use the Lord's Prayer in Public Worship, and every kind of religious gathering? Yes, but has the Christian Church ever in actual thought and practice made this doctrine fundamental? Has it, or

any branch of it, or any period of history, not only based all its doctrines upon this foundation, but actually drawn all its subordinate doctrines from this one? Is "Fatherhood" the fundamental conception of God in the system of John Calvin, or of any other? Have all other Christian conceptions been interpreted in the light of and in harmony with this doctrine? Has Fatherhood always been that conception of God through which we have interpreted the Atonement.⁹ Has the governing conception of the Church been that of a family of God? To me it is perfectly clear, amazing as it seems, that Fatherhood has never yet been the *fundamental* and *controlling* conception of God in our theology.

In our Forward Movement, then, which is to influence both thought and life, I would suggest that the Doctrine of Fatherhood be that idea of God in the light of which we approach and explain all other religious teachings. Do not let us say Father and mean King. Do not let us say Father and mean Judge. It is not necessary to deny God's Kingship or Judgeship. Is not every father in a sense king and judge in his own family? But the ideas of the Kingship and Judgeship of God must be subordinate to that of His Fatherhood.

(8) How does God become known to man? Chiefly through man himself. Not indeed that each man's religious yearnings and experiences are a sufficient guide to himself, any more than his intellectual faculty is independent of external guidance, instruction, support. The rejection of Infallible Authority as the ultimate basis of faith, does not involve the rejection of all authority. The Bible is a great record of religious experiences of a people in whose life and thought religion occupied a quite unique place. It is not, I think, too much to say that the main river of revelation flows through the pages of the Bible, though we need not deny that many tributaries flow into that river from other sources. We need not, nay, we must not claim for it in-

(9) Cf. Rashdall's important work on *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, especially Chap. I.

fallibility. It is not infallible in its science, history or morality. But regarded as a record of experience of unique value, we win back our Bible enriched for us in more ways than one, by the purging process of Historical Criticism.

In this book of religious experiences, mediated through lawgivers and sages, poets, prophets and apostles, one figure stands forth supreme. "Jesus in the midst." The long development discerned in the Old Testament history, made Israel as it were the womb in which could be conceived, and from which in the fulness of time could be born, the Son of God. Or to change the metaphor, Jesus is the supreme flower born of the stem of Israel, for which Israel's whole previous history was the preparation. Moses helps us to know God, Isaiah helps us, the Psalmists help us, the Apostles help us, but the men who knew Jesus and companied with Him, place Him upon a higher plane whereon He stands alone. The revelation of the Infinite through man in Him attains its completion. And this found its most satisfying description in the famous words of St. John's Gospel. "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." And yet none was ever more emphatic than Jesus, that not in the acceptance of doctrines about Him, but in a living experience of love and devotion to Him, lay the true Christianity. Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." *He never defined Himself.* but men out of their experiences became convinced that He was "the Word" of God, and "the Way, the Truth and the Life."

(4) The emphasis which of recent years had been laid upon social philosophy, has had its reaction upon our conception of the fundamental nature of the Church. Many of us have come to see that the full connotation of the word "Catholic" as descriptive of the Church has perhaps never been grasped save in the Epistles of St. Paul. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out by the Dean of St. Paul and other writers the *ideal* of the Holy Catholic Church as it existed in the minds of the greatest thinkers of

the Middle Ages was truly Catholic, and I am convinced that we should do well to study that conception to-day, not, indeed, with a view to any return of the past, such as some vainly long for, but that we should grasp its essential spirit with a view to giving it that embodiment which is adapted to our own environment. Although the medieval ideal was always far from realisation, yet even in its imperfect form it made a splendid contribution to the establishment of Christianity in Europe. ¹⁰

The Reformation, being largely a reaction in favour of individualism, naturally undertook no thorough-going examination and criticism of the idea of the Church. To the reformer the old Church appeared to be a great tyranny, but instead of distinguishing between the true idea of the Church, and its inadequate and false presentation by Rome, it relegated it to the background. It simply postulated an invisible Church of true believers (this too is at bottom an individualistic conception) and either developed a very singular, not to say absurd theory of state Churches, expressed in the phrase *cujus regio ejus religio*, or, when that theory quickly broke down, fell into mere denominationalism. Its endeavour to find in the New Testament the revealed form of the Visible Church, of course failed because it is not there.

It is clear then that the time is ripe for an attempt to restate the doctrine, or, I should prefer to say, the ideal of a Catholic Church. I am not unmindful of the fact that many such attempts have for some time been under way. The great emphasis laid upon the subject of Church Unity, the many gatherings for its discussion, the Conference on Faith and Order, are all signs of the times. But we have not yet achieved a philosophy of the Church that can command the allegiance of men of good will and of modern mind.

On this vast subject I desire to say this only:

The idea of the Church must relate itself to the

(10) Cf. Bryce: *The Holy Roman Empire*. Chap. VII.

fundamental idea of God. The Church so long and still so largely conceived of as a hierarchy had for its underlying idea the thought of God as king, as absolute monarch.¹¹ But this as we have seen is not the fundamental idea of God which is that of Fatherhood. Very naturally and very beautifully there springs from this source the idea of the Church as the Family of God. When we clearly grasp this idea then the hierarchical idea is seen to be false and injurious. The notion of a priesthood as a class of men standing in closer relation to God than others in virtue of ordination, and as endowed by that ordination with powers either in word or sacrament, which gives them alone the inherent power of the distribution of God's grace, is clearly incompatible with the thought of the Church as a family of brothers and sisters. But hitherto, as I have said, the idea of the Fatherhood of God has not been the fundamental idea. Theology, out of which all other doctrines grow, and by which they must be tested. And hence the Church

(11) And this thought of God as a kind of emperor gave shape to the ritual of the Eucharist, as Gregory of Nyssa in a highly illuminating passage from his treatise on the Holy Spirit plainly declares: "Inasmuch as men when approaching emperors and potentates for the objects which they wish in some way to obtain from those rulers, do not bring to them their mere petition only, but employ every possible means to induce them to feel pity and favour toward themselves, clasping their knees, prostrating themselves on the ground, and putting forward to plead for their petition all sorts of pathetic signs to wake that pity, so it is that those who recognize the true Potentate... when they are supplicating for that which they have at heart, some lowly in spirit because of pitiable conditions in this world, some with their thoughts lifted up because of their eternal mysterious hopes, seeing that they know not how to ask and that their humanity is not capable of displaying any reverence that can reach to the grandeur of that glory, they carry the ceremonial used in the case of men into the service of the Deity. And this is what worship is, that worship I mean, which is offered for objects we have at heart along with supplication and humiliation." (Cf. Allen, *Christian Institutions*, p. 539). But alongside of this elaborate comparison between the ceremonial court of a Greek Emperor and the ritual of the Eucharist, set the words of Jesus: "When ye pray, say, Our Father," and we see what a gulf separates the theology of the fifth century from the "mind of Christ."

has never been comprehensively expounded as the family of God. ¹²

IV

It is not my intention to weary you or my readers with further illustrations of my thought of the way in which Christianity may be set forth harmoniously with the environment of our times, and in such fashion as will render a Forward Movement a real spiritual advance towards the goal longed for of all saints and men of good will. But I believe that the great words which name the primary Christian ideas will stand,—Redemption or Atonement, Justification, Sanctification, Eternal Life—albeit the content which we shall find in them will not be in all respects such as our fathers found. But changes have before been made more than once in respect of most of them. ¹³ Nor, may I point out, is there anything in this position inconsistent with the general conception of evolution. On the contrary the combination of continuity and of change such as is displayed in the history of doctrine is distinctly harmonious with it.

I desire now to turn to a more practical aspect of our subject. Does this general conception of Christianity thus most sketchily outlined, fit into the environment of our times? Does it meet and offer a principle of solution for our own peculiar problems? Is it thus good news, a veritable gospel?

To answer this question it will be necessary to glance at the outstanding features of our times.

(1) The rejection of absolute external authority in the realms of knowledge and of politics is certainly a marked

(12) Of course I am not claiming originality for this idea. I learned it forty years ago from Frederick Dendison Maurice, to whom the Church was "the Universal Society." In recent years the Church idea has been beautifully expounded by the late Professor Royce as "The Beloved Society."

(13) The most rudimentary knowledge of the history of the Doctrine of the Atonement proves this.

feature of our age, and herein we find a correspondence between its general attitude towards authority, and that to which science and historical criticism compel us in the sphere of theology. Freedom of research in the realm of knowledge, and freedom in the realm of politics, must be accompanied by freedom in the realm of theology. It is, I believe, due to the general supposition that theology is not free that it has fallen into such general contempt in these times.

(2) The word Democracy, more than any other single word sums up the age in which we live. Democracy in its larger philosophical sense means more than "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." It is more comprehensively phrased in equally terse and even more famous words :

"The rank is but the guinea stamp—
The man's the gowd for a' that."

To which I may be permitted to add the following lines from Stopford Brooke's lectures or "Naturalism in English Poetry," slightly adapted to my purpose. "There is only one man, if we may so style it, in all humanity; all divisions therefore, classes, outside differences, such as are made by birth, by rank, by wealth, by power, or by separate nationalities, are to be wholly put aside as non-existent. There is a universal mankind, every member of which ought to be free, with equal opportunities, and bound to each other as brothers are bound.¹⁴

How does the simple theology which I have ventured to suggest shall underlie and inspire our Forward Movement accord with this conception of democracy. Surely it not only fits it as glove to the hand, but it supplies it with that religious spirit, without which it cannot be true to itself. The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man are the rock foundations upon which democracy must rest. In spite of the fact that we all flung up our caps for

(14) Pp. 72, 73.

democracy during the war, yet there are many among us who have a claim to be heard as men of thought and knowledge and goodwill who have misgivings concerning democracy. But do not these doubts spring from the falseness of democracy to its high ideals? Like other older and rejected ideals it sometimes goes astray after the God of power rather than of love. Based upon the principle of unselfishness, it may become grossly selfish; universal in principle it can sink to the support of class interests; and then it is on the high road to corruption, and with its lofty vision of truth and love darkened, it can become the prey of money, or the tool of flattery, or the victim of a debased press. What can save it but the constant, clear, and convincing proclamation of the truth that One is our Father and all we are brethren. God as Father, revealed in Christ, men as brothers, knit together by the Spirit into one communion and fellowship in the Church, now envisaged as the Family of God, such is the gospel of Democracy, and who will deny that it is true to the deepest thoughts and principles of Jesus.

(3) This same Gospel would seem also worthy to afford the one message which can alone harmonize the various social discordancies of our time. The Church, indeed, has no authority to define or decide in details of economic controversy or forms of government. But her task is to announce with the power of a living conviction that the principles which alone can solve our difficulties and bring harmony out of discord are the principles of the Gospel, the simple Gospel of Brotherhood rooted in Fatherhood; that society is one; that, in spite of all limited appearances, the interests of all are inter-related interests; that mankind is a body of many parts but of one life, and that the Church is the Commonwealth of God, these doctrines preached as supreme may also prove "Good News" for this generation.

(4) Perhaps the greatest of all our problems to-day, and that upon the issue of which more than upon any other the world's salvation turns, is the problem of the true relations of nations to each other, and how we may establish a true,

wholesome, stable Internationalism. It is at this point that the Church has most signally failed to preach the Gospel. And yet there are few problems to which Christianity would seem to be more directly related than this of international relations. For, as Frederick Denison Maurice long since pointed out, there are three great social units of Society. The Family, the Nation and the Race, and with each of these the Bible has much to do. Its first book deals altogether with families, revealing incidentally (as it seems) the principles of family life. The remainder of the Old Testament has to do with a Nation, and in its course incidentally reveals that righteousness which alone exalteth a nation. But in the New Testament we transcend the limits of family and nation and have to do with man, and with the race. Its message is for the world, and since it has to do with the race, the society in which its universal spirit is embodied is conceived of as the Universal Society. How much, or rather how little, of this do we get in the theologies of the Reformation period. How selfish, how petty, in the light of this glorious idealism does much of our theology still appear! The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Church as the Family of God and the Nations as its several members, here are ideas, doctrines, truths, peculiarly adapted to meet the crises of our times. What more inspiring object can a Forward Movement present to our Canada than that, now, in its formative years, with a great history assured to it, it should lay down deeply in the minds of its people the true doctrines of nationalism and patriotism and relate them to the still greater doctrines of internationalism and humanity.

Our Forward Movement must have its starting point in ideals. Its ideals must also be its guides. It is as one small contribution to the expression of its ideals that I venture to address to you this open letter. All ideals of human life may, no doubt, be gathered up into one *Summum Bonum*. But the *Summum Bonum* is a synthesis of many ideals, and these must not only be adequately stated but harmoniously ordered. Christianity itself in one of its

many aspects has been recently described in a notable work as a great synthesis of widely differing ideals and religions. To the historian "it appears not a single religion but a complex of many."¹⁵ "It is becoming increasingly certain that Christianity in the first century achieved a synthesis between the Greco-Oriental and the Jewish religions in the Roman Empire."¹⁶ "The suggestion is a fruitful one, and in its light we may gain an enlarged vision of the many hued wisdom of God."¹⁷ But it is peculiarly appropriate to our times because it would appear that following the universal critical analysis applied to every department of knowledge, whose results are now fairly well catalogued, the time is ripe for a positive synthesis upon the basis of this critical analysis, which shall include and seek to bind together all that is True and Beautiful and Good. And Christianity which in one of its aspects became the synthesis of Greco-Oriental and Jewish religions at the outset of its career, is large enough to include within the bounds of its all-embracing principles the Good wherever it may be found. We need a Christianity that shall be more intense, that is more completely focussed at one centre, but we also need a Christianity that shall be larger and wider in its circumference than in times past, and which shall test men and systems not by their particular position on the circumference, but by the direction of their activities and tendencies towards or away from the centre. In such a synthesis there will be revealed the true Catholicism, wherein neither men nor systems will ultimately be judged by external conformities of creed, worship or organization, but by the spirit which animates and harmonizes them. From such a perfect humanity we are no doubt very far. But such, as it seems, is the goal, the city of God to be revealed in the last time, and towards it our Forward Movement must press. "Humanity" truly cried

(15) Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake: *The Beginnings of Christianity*.

(16) *Ut sup.*, p. vii.

(17) *Ephesians* iii., 10.

the great South African Smuts "has once more struck its tents and is again on the march." But who are its guides and whither is it going? Shall we move on only to fresh catastrophes, repeating in the new environment the old blunders, lost in the waste for want of leading and of light, or shall it be

"On, on to the City of God? ¹⁸

The future lies hidden from our gaze. But a sufficiently aspiring, inspiring and illuminating Forward Movement ought to have much to do with the answer to that question.

With sincere regard,

Believe me, dear Dr. Fraser,

Very sincerely yours,

HERBERT SYMONDS.

(18) Matthew Arnold, "*Rugby Chapel*."